

ONCE IN A BLUE MOON

by HAROLD MACGRATH

Author of "THE MAN ON THE BOX"

ILLUSTRATED BY ROBERT E. JOHNSON

THE STORY UP TO THIS POINT.

Arthur Cathew, petted son of a wealthy family, is suddenly awakened by a noise at his door. Arthur's habit of late sleeping is rudely broken by a message from his father, delivered by the butler, that Arthur is to present himself at the elder Cathew's office at once for an interview. Arthur kisses his mother goodnight and hastens to a meeting which he knows will not be peaceful.

Cathew senior, with much force and little diplomacy, reveals to his son that the son has set upon his day of recklessness. Arthur is put upon an allowance of \$200 a month with the alternative of \$50,000 as a lump settlement. Arthur chooses the \$200 a month, a job following the announcement of his best girl that she wouldn't marry him if he were the only man left.

The elder Cathew makes one provision, however, that leaves a loophole for Arthur. It is that he will increase the allowance when Arthur lays before him \$10,000, honestly earned.

That night within a stone's throw of his club young Cathew is attacked and he awakes in the forecastle of a steamer bound for San Francisco via Suez. A collision with a mate resulted in serious damage to Cathew but drew him closer to Corrigan, who proposes a joint search for treasure concealed in a heathen idol. Corrigan has a map of the location tattooed on one of his legs. Cathew agrees to join the enterprise.

An expedition to the interior of Malacca results in securing the treasure, rubies and sapphires from the foot of an idol. Resentment on the part of the natives on account of this sacrilege results in an attack in which Corrigan dies.

THE priests were moving about. They were bringing fags for a fire. Cathew stirred a little, but only a little, as the things were of elephant-hide. There was not a bone in his body that did not ache. Somewhere during the melee he had been struck upon the mouth. His lips were cracked and puffed; and he could barely see out of one eye.

Where was Corrigan? He craned his neck but could see no sign. Torture! Now he remembered all of Corrigan's warnings, that it was far better to die than to fall into the hands of these religious fanatics. They were building the fire for him. Then it was that fear entered his heart, and he wriggled his toes to make sure that his shoes were still on his feet!

Later they came to him and rolled him toward the fire. Two sat on his body while a third bound his arms at the elbows and fixed his wrists. How he struggled, choking sometimes as the pungent smoke drifted into his face! Deliberately the priest pushed the straining hands into the heart of the glowing faggots. Cathew screamed in agony. The tom-toms began to beat furiously. Here and there they chanted dolorously.

In the midst of all this pow-wow came the sharp crack of a rifle. The priest holding Cathew's hands toppled over into the fire, scattering it.

"Corrigan?" murmured the victim, and sank down into a soundless world of utter darkness.

D. R. NORDFELDT, at the head of a botanical exploring party from Johore, with a hunting expedition as a side issue, was well pleased with himself. He had seen what white men rarely see and still more rarely live to tell—ceremonial torture.

Half a dozen shots had broken up the affair. His elephants had evidently convinced the priests that there was an army behind. One white man he had buried; the other lay at one side of the hunting bowditch, his hands in enormous white bandages. He looked like a dead man, but he was only under the influence of opium. Sometimes a low groan issued from his swollen purple lips. Cathew tried to speak.

"What? What is it you're trying to say?" asked Nordfeldt.

"Corrigan?" In a muffled tone.

"Your friend? We buried him. He wasn't a pleasant sight to look at. But I think he was already dead when they mutilated him."

Tears welled up into Cathew's eyes and rolled down his cheeks. For now he knew that he had loved the derelict.

"Did... you bury him... with his shoes on?"

"God save us, Nash, did you hear that?"

"Give them back. We can't do that? With his shoes on? Just as we found him; but I don't remember whether he had any shoes on or not. Now, what in the name of Tophet were you two white men doing up here all alone? Hadn't you any forethought? Where'd you come from?"

"Did you have any servants?"

"No."

"Didn't they tell you at Perak that the country was pretty dangerous?"

"We knew. My God, don't ask me any more questions! I'm in hell!"

At the end of two months—for the Doctor refused to let his chance patient interfere with his researches—the expedition returned to Johore.

And Cathew bought a first-class ticket to Singapore—fourteen miles away—in order that he might have a compartment alone. When the train was fairly out of the city, Cathew took off his shoe and wretched loose the heel.

Two rubies and an emerald; they had not been touched! Sweat trickled down the end of his nose and spattered on the gems. And now to sell them.

Vaguely he recalled that Corrigan had said something about Vaal, a Dutchman in the pawnbroking business, who knocked you down a lot, but generally gave you something worth while. He was leaving the district when he ran full tilt into a Sikh policeman.

"Vaal," he said, "paw-broking."

The Sikh spoke a little English, and gave the direction affably. It was a dingy shop. He saw a huge bearded man behind the desk, talking to a pretty woman. Suddenly the man caught her by the arm and flung her against the rear partition.

It was evident to Cathew that he had entered upon a scene of domestic infelicity. A family row, however, was nothing to him. He wanted to sell the stones.

"Is this Vaal?" he inquired.

"Ah! Coom in, coom in, sir," said the proprietor.

The young woman remained with her back to the partition, suddenly rubbing her bruised arm. Her skin was tawny and her hair was black; but she was patently a white woman.

"Do you buy stones?" demanded Cathew.

"Sometimes," with sudden aloofness.

"I don't mean on the pawn-ticket basis," went on Cathew. "A lump sum outright."

"Come over here under the light," said the proprietor, and Cathew stepped under the lamp, and Cathew dug into his watch-pocket.

"What will you give me for these?" "Hush, hant me der glass."

The woman obeyed, but she looked with new interest at this young man who had doubtless saved her a beating.

"Where did you get these?"

"None of your business," answered Cathew sharply.

Vaal turned them over and over.

"I will gift you five-hundred rupees for dem... or I will call in der police."

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